

CAHS

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee

Re: H.B. 6218 – An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services

S.B. 840 – An Act Concerning Educational Activities for Participants in the Jobs First Program

H.B. 5588 – An Act Concerning Educational Opportunities for Recipients of Temporary Family Assistance Benefits Under the Jobs First Program

H.B. 5560 – An Act Concerning an Evaluation of the Medicaid Program

**Submitted by Maggie Adair, Deputy Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good morning, Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Human Services Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year-old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

I am here today to testify in support of four bills:

- H.B. 6218 – An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services
- S.B. 840 – An Act Concerning Educational Activities for Participants in the Jobs First Program
- H.B. 5558 – An Act Concerning Educational Opportunities for Recipients of Temporary Family Assistance Benefits Under the Jobs First Program
- H.B. 5560 – An Act Concerning an Evaluation of the Medicaid Program

CAHS support the concept of **H.B. 6218 – An Act Establishing a Task Force on Safety Net Services**. The Task Force would develop proposals to improve mechanisms for accessing basic safety net services, such as SNAP, WIC, Care 4 Kids, and HUSKY, as well as improve the TFA and Jobs First Program. As we know, clients face hurdles in enrolling in benefit programs. They stand in long lines at DSS offices, paperwork is time-consuming and sometimes is misplaced, and DSS staff have unreasonable caseloads. The biggest problem is the lack of technology within the state agencies. DSS alone goes through roughly 45 million pieces of paper annually for public benefit programs. In our age of technology, this is not acceptable.

DSS is making progress with its modernization project, which will bring in new technology to greatly facilitate the process, restructure staff roles, create more flexibility in worker's responsibilities, and reconfigure DSS offices. We have met with DSS to review the project and were very impressed with the research and thinking that has taken place to address the benefit enrollment process. Clients would have options to enroll in benefit programs either by phone, in person, or on-line; this choice is respectful of the various needs of individuals. We urge policy makers to ensure that this project moves forward expeditiously. Currently, the modernization project would not apply for the Care 4 Kids Program, and we urge that Care 4 Kids be incorporated as soon as possible.

The Task Force on Safety Net Services would be helpful in moving the DSS modernization along as well as to develop proposals for benefits programs in other agencies, such as the Department of Public Health.

We respectfully suggest that the membership of the Task Force be broadened to include members of the public, including advocates, nonprofit providers, state employees, and client participants. Inclusion of these sectors will enrich the work of the Task Force.

We also support the concept of **H.B. 840, An Act Concerning Educational Activities for Participants in the Jobs First Program.** This bill would allow Jobs First program participants to secure an additional six-month extension of benefits under the Temporary Family Assistance program if they are engaged in educational activities to include adult basic education, vocational education, skills training or subsidized employment. This bill would provide needed financial support to adults who are playing by the rules and securing skills they need to enter the work force.

We do recognize that this bill has financial considerations and acknowledge that new funding is unlikely in this fiscal climate. As an alternative, the Committee may want to consider establishing a small, low-cost pilot program to provide a small number of Jobs First participants a six-month extension coupled with intensive case management and funding to pay for enrollment in educational activities.

CAHS also supports the intent of **H.B. 5558 – An Act Concerning Educational Opportunities for Recipients of Temporary Family Assistance Benefits Under the Jobs First Program.** Allowing Jobs First participants to satisfy the first 20 hours of work experience or employment by attending educational activities makes a lot of sense. First, most participants are not ready to enter the work force and need the educational skills to do so. Second, jobs are scarce in this economy and time would be better spent getting educated so participants are ready to secure a job when the job market recovers. The bill language, however, may impact the Connecticut's work participation rate as required by federal law. This issue needs further exploration.

CAHS supports the concept of **H.B. 5560 – An Act Concerning an Evaluation of the Medicaid Program.** The Medicaid program totals nearly \$4 billion of the state's \$19 billion state budget, covering children, adults and elderly in Connecticut. A program of this magnitude merits an in-depth, rigorous and evidence-based evaluation. This type of evaluation requires expertise, considerable staff time, and funding. Given the budget situation, it's not clear if there are available funds to pay for this much-needed project. Also, such a project is complicated by the Administration's new plan to move HUSKY and Charter Oak out of a managed care system to an Administrative Service Organization system, and to transition to Medicaid Fee for Service (FFS) system to a more managed FSS model. The question for policy makers is whether an evaluation should be completed before moving to an ASO system, or implementing an ASO system and use a small portion of the anticipated cost-savings to conduct an evidence-based evaluation. The latter choice seems to make more sense.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.